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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!! If you're like me, you're probably still enjoying holiday leftovers, and perhaps loosening the belt a few extra notches these days! As I'm sure I've mentioned numerous times over the years here, I really enjoy my Thanksgiving meal! It's something that really only happens once a year, so I like to go all out. If you're also a little like me, we need a little time to relax from the turkey festivities! So, sit back, relax with another piece of pumpkin pie, and enjoy this week's issue of A-ONE!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Xbox, PlayStation Tackle Console Launch Glitches!
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A Revolution in User Experience!
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And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Xbox, PlayStation Tackle Console Launch Glitches

Move over, zombies. Step aside, terrorists. Aliens, out of the way.

There are a few new foes affecting gamers that are proving to be far more destructive than any on-screen villain.

With nicknames like "the blue light of death" and "the disc drive of

doom," they're the game-ending glitches causing headaches for a few gamers who picked up the next-generation Xbox One and PlayStation 4 consoles at launch.

Microsoft Corp. said Monday it's replacing the Xbox One units of users who have reported systems that won't read discs, an issue dubbed "the disc drive of doom." The company said the problem is affecting "a very small number" of customers, who will also receive one free downloadable game from Microsoft Game Studios.

Sony Corp. announced after the debut of the PS4 earlier this month that it was replacing the units for "less than 1 percent" of users whose new consoles malfunctioned and displayed a pulsating blue light. The problem was given the moniker "the blue light of death."

Both glitches recall Microsoft's "red ring of death," when production problems caused several predecessors of the Xbox One to lock up and display three flashing red lights. Ultimately, the technology giant extended customers' warranties to three years and said in 2007 that it had spent more than $1 billion to repair the problems associated with the Xbox 360.

"I understand these things happen, but it sucks when they happen to you," said Donald Blankinship, an Xbox One owner who experienced a faulty disc drive after purchasing the console at Best Buy. "I can still play downloadable games until the replacement arrives, so at least there's that."

Other users have reported consoles being completely unresponsive out of the box. Both Sony and Microsoft said they're working to troubleshoot such issues and replace broken consoles as quickly as possible.

While the issues seem to affect a minority of Xbox One and PS4 owners, the concerns could deter consumers who regularly play games on smartphones and mobile devices. Sony's PS4 costs $399. Microsoft's Xbox One cost $100 more and includes a Kinect sensor.

"When I think about the Xbox brand, we want it to mean quality," said Phil Spencer, corporate vice president of Microsoft Game Studios, at last week's Xbox One launch event. "That's critical to us. I think you can overcome things, but we don't plan on that. We plan on testing it tens of thousands of hours to make sure it's going to be a solid launch."

Microsoft and Sony both announced that more than 1 million Xbox One and PS4 consoles were sold in the 24 hours after their release this month. It's been seven and eight years respectively since Microsoft and Sony launched the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Sony said it expects to sell 5 million PS4 units by the end of its fiscal year in March.

For Video Game Consoles, A Revolution in User Experience

From the first Atari Space Invaders consoles to the Nintendo Wii, game consoles have been the it toys of their generations. That s a trend that Sony and Microsoft are hoping to repeat with their plays for the holiday season: the PlayStation 4 and the Xbox One.

But even as consumers prepare to plop down hundreds of dollars for the

latest systems, industry watchers are asking: Is gaming evolving beyond the console? After all, it has been nearly a decade since these two titans of the industry released new consoles. Put another way: When the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 hit the market, there was no such thing as an iPhone.

In that time, the average American s expectations for technology have changed considerably. We ve dropped our one-use devices digital cameras, camcorders, music players in favor of tiny pocket computers that do everything. And that includes playing games.

Consequently, the face of gaming is going through a major shift. Fifty-eight percent of Americans report they play games of some stripe, according to the Entertainment Software Association. That trend is heavily driven by growth in mobile games, as one could see with a quick survey of smartphone screens on the Metro; you ll see a lot of Candy Crush out there.

The average gamer is still the enthusiast, however. This guy is 30 and has been playing games for more than a decade, according to the ESA report. These are hard-core gamers, who grew up blowing dust off of Nintendo cartridges and munching on pizza during campus Halo tournaments. But gaming is now reaching a wider and more diversified audience, and there s a push for gamemakers to think outside of the console.

Game consoles didn t start as all-in-one entertainment machines. In fact, they were first designed to play just a few games or even one at a time. Atari s original home console for Pong, for example, played only Pong. Later systems from Atari came with a handful of games such as hockey, handball and table tennis, or with one blockbuster game, such as Space Invaders.

That all changed in the 1980s, when gaming saw a shift to a cartridge-based system. That set off a golden age of gaming; it was much cheaper to swap in a new cartridge with a cool new game rather than buy another system. But it also led to a glut of games and low-quality consoles that inspired upstarts to dive in.

The influx was bad for the industry in a number of ways. For one, plenty of companies that knew nothing about games jumped on the bandwagon, meaning that bad games came from food companies, toothpaste makers and movie studios. And console makers didn t make money off games from other firms, losing profits as the market flood crowded out their own titles. Overwhelmed customers started to lose their drive to play and also turned to playing games on computers rather than consoles. By December 1982, Atari in particular was suffering and released one of the greatest bombs of all time: E.T., the video game.

The industry fell into what s known as the Game Crash of 1983, which saw several companies jump out of the game market and ultimately pushed industry-leading Atari into insolvency.

iBuyPower’s Steam Machine Offers PC Specs for The Price of A New Xbox

Valve’s official Steam Machine prototype isn’t cheap, but it won’t be the only Steam-powered video-game console available come 2014. This morning, iBuyPower revealed a prototype of its own upcoming Steam Machine, which

will go on sale for just $499 next year. For the price of an Xbox One, the computer will offer a multicore AMD CPU and a discrete AMD Radeon R9 270 graphics card that’s a $180 GPU all by itself and come with Valve’s Steam Controller as part of the package deal.

The company says the box is bigger than a PlayStation 4 but smaller than Microsoft’s Xbox One, and comes standard with Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and a 500GB hard drive. The glossy white case also has a fully customizable light bar running down the center channel, and an integrated power supply. You won’t have to find room for a power brick on your home entertainment center shelves.

For the price, you won’t be getting Windows, only Valve’s Linux-based Steam OS, which could be an issue starting out. While Valve has quite a few games running on Linux already, and says that major game developers will be building triple-A game titles specifically for Steam OS in 2014, it’s not quite the same as having the entire Windows catalog as a fallback. Still, iBuyPower says that existing Steam for Linux games should run quite well, at full 1080p resolution and 60 frames per second. We’re looking forward to see just how much power iBuyPower can provide for under $500.

On This Day in History: Atari Creates Video Games

In 1958, scientists in New York made a primitive computer game called Tennis for Two . But it wasn t until 1971 that the first attempt at a mass-market, coin-operated video game emerged.

 Computer Space proved too complicated and received few orders. But its creators went on to found Atari, which in 1972 came up with a hit.

Inspired by a game bundled with the early home computer system Magnavox Odyssey, Pong allowed two people to play simulated paddle tennis against each other.

The simple concept, combined with deliberate design quirks to ensured games were limited in length, proved such a hit that Atari scrapped plans to develop it with other firms and launched the product on its own.

Atari initially struggled to keep up with demand, and before long games machines were appearing everywhere.

Rivals entered the market with clones; others worked on fresh ideas. The arcade industry boomed, helped by games such as Space Invaders (1978) and Pac-Man (1980).

Eventually, the market become saturated: machine sales peaked at $8bn in 1981 ($25.2bn in today s money), although they remained high throughout the 1980s.

But Pong s greatest legacy lay in the boost it gave the development of home computer games, starting with the home version of Pong in 1975, which sold 150,000 units in the first few months of release.

On its first day of release this month, over a million PlayStation 4 units were sold globally.

Pac-Man Breaks Projection Mapping Record

Interactive agency Running In The Halls (RITH) has laid claim to hosting the world s largest playable projection on a historic industrial building in London, UK. The agency teamed up with AV equipment provider Blitz Communications to achieve the feat which saw the classic video game Pac-Man projected across a 2,219 square metre area, as witnessed by the Guinness Book of Records.

TV programme the Gadget Show and Pac-Man creator Namco Bandai commissioned the event to celebrate the 2014 launch of Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures game. The feat is said to have doubled the previously held record for a playable game on a projection mapped building surface.

The game maps were entirely designed around the building, explained Shay Moradi, a partner in RITH.

The only really tricky part was doing multiple variations of the map so that we could find one that was playable. Ultimately we wanted genuine reactions from the people playing it, we wanted it to be a fun game.

The crew set up outside the ExCel building, which hosted the Plasa show earlier in the year, and projected onto the 1930s Millenium Mills building across the Royal Victoria Docks waterway. A surveyor had measured the whole building down to the centimetre beforehand. Six Barco FLM-HD20 projectors and the company s ImagePRO video scaler were used for the project, as well as Extron DVI DA 8 Plus distribution amplifiers and Lightware Fiber TX110-RX 110 DVI fibre extenders.

RITH describes itself as an interactive agency that designs and develops apps, websites and large scale interactive installations. The firm found itself tasked with a similar projection mapping project on the same building last year, so the territory was not unfamiliar.

The only thing we changed was some the colours to make them suitable for projection, Moradi said.

For instance the original Pac-Man uses a very deep blue which would have been suitable for CRTs back in the day but we went for a lighter blue to make it really shine and stand out. It looked like it was lasered onto the building, it was that bright.

After putting all this hard work in, the crew had a nail-biting wait for the giant controller to arrive which was to operate the game. It was delivered with just minutes to spare before the record attempt began.

The feat will be shown on UK TV Channel 5 s The Gadget Show on 9th December at 8pm.

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Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Spies Worry Over "Doomsday" Cache Stashed by ex-NSA Contractor Snowden

British and U.S. intelligence officials say they are worried about a "doomsday" cache of highly classified, heavily encrypted material they believe former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden has stored on a data cloud.

The cache contains documents generated by the NSA and other agencies and includes names of U.S. and allied intelligence personnel, seven current and former U.S. officials and other sources briefed on the matter said.

The data is protected with sophisticated encryption, and multiple passwords are needed to open it, said two of the sources, who like the others spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

The passwords are in the possession of at least three different people and are valid for only a brief time window each day, they said. The identities of persons who might have the passwords are unknown.

Spokespeople for both NSA and the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence declined to comment.

One source described the cache of still unpublished material as Snowden’s "insurance policy" against arrest or physical harm.

U.S. officials and other sources said only a small proportion of the classified material Snowden downloaded during stints as a contract systems administrator for NSA has been made public. Some Obama Administration officials have said privately that Snowden downloaded enough material to fuel two more years of news stories.

"The worst is yet to come," said one former U.S. official who follows the investigation closely.

Snowden, who is believed to have downloaded between 50,000 and 200,000 classified NSA and British government documents, is living in Russia under temporary asylum, where he fled after traveling to Hong Kong. He has been charged in the United States under the Espionage Act.

Cryptome, a website which started publishing leaked secret documents years before the group WikiLeaks or Snowden surfaced, estimated that the total number of Snowden documents made public so far is over 500.

Given Snowden’s presence in Moscow, and the low likelihood that he will return to the United States anytime soon, U.S. and British authorities say they are focused more on dealing with the consequences of the material he has released than trying to apprehend him.

It is unclear whether U.S. or allied intelligence agencies - or those of adversary services such as Russia’s and China’s -

know where the material is stored and, if so, have tried to unlock it.

One former senior U.S. official said that the Chinese and Russians have cryptographers skilled enough to open the cache if they find it.

Snowden’s revelations of government secrets have brought to light extensive and previously unknown surveillance of phone, email and social media communications by the NSA and allied agencies. That has sparked several diplomatic rows between Washington and its allies, along with civil liberties debates in Europe, the United States and elsewhere.

Among the material which Snowden acquired from classified government computer servers, but which has not been published by media outlets known to have had access to it, are documents containing names and resumes of employees working for NSA’s British counterpart, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), sources familiar with the matter said.

The sources said Snowden started downloading some of it from a classified GCHQ website, known as GC-Wiki, when he was employed by Dell and assigned to NSA in 2012.

Snowden made a calculated decision to move from Dell Inc to another NSA contractor, Booz Allen Hamilton, because he would have wide-ranging access to NSA data at the latter firm, one source with knowledge of the matter said.

Glenn Greenwald, who met with Snowden in Hong Kong and was among the first to report on the leaked documents for the Guardian newspaper, said the former NSA contractor had "taken extreme precautions to make sure many different people around the world have these archives to insure the stories will inevitably be published."

"If anything happens at all to Edward Snowden, he has arranged for them to get access to the full archives," Greenwald said in a June interview with the Daily Beast website. He added: "I don’t know for sure whether has more documents than the ones he has given me... I believe he does."

In an email exchange with Reuters, Greenwald, who has said he remains in contact with Snowden, affirmed his statements about Snowden’s "precautions" but said he had nothing to add.

Officials believe that the "doomsday" cache is stored and encrypted separately from any material that Snowden has provided to media outlets.

Conservative British politicians, including Louise Mensch, a former member of parliament, have accused the Guardian, one of two media outlets to first publish stories based on Snowden’s leaks, of "trafficking of GCHQ agents’ names abroad."

No names of British intelligence personnel have been published by any media outlet. After U.K. officials informed the Guardian it could face legal action, the newspaper disclosed it had destroyed computers containing Snowden material on GCHQ, but had provided copies of the data to the New York Times and the U.S. nonprofit group ProPublica.

Sources familiar with unpublished material Snowden downloaded said it also contains information about the CIA - possibly including personnel names - as well as other U.S. spy agencies such as the National Reconnaissance Office and National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, which operate U.S. image-producing satellites and analyze their data.

U.S. security officials have indicated in briefings they do not know what, if any, of the material is still in Snowden’s personal possession. Snowden himself has been quoted as saying he took no such materials with

him to Russia.

NSA Malware Reportedly Infects More Than 50,000 Computers Worldwide

The NSA-related cover surveillance operations are further detailed in a report by Dutch publication NRC that claims that more than 50,000 computers worldwide have been infected with NSA-operated malware. The software, hidden in computer networks belonging to organizations such as mobile operators across the globe, can remain dormant for years and be activated at will for personal data collection. The publication says it had access to documents provided by NSA employee turned whistleblower Edward Snowden that prove the agency s complex hacking operation.

According to the report, there are over 1,000 hackers working for a special department inside the agency called Tailored Access Operations or TAO. NSA hackers had apparently infected 20,000 computers with such Computer Network Exploitation or CNE programs back in 2008, a Washington Post story revealed in August, but the number has risen to 50,000 computers by mid-2012.

By having access to such computers, the NSA can collect personal data that it wouldn t have access to otherwise. One example reveals that Belgium carrier Belgacom was infiltrated by British intelligence, giving the agency access to customers telephone and traffic data in a hack that was discovered in September 2013. In this case, the computers were infected via LinkedIn.

This is only one of the newest reports offering more details about the NSA s spying efforts. Earlier reports have convinced tech companies that they need to further improve the protection they offer to consumers, and to put up a fight, trying to limit the scope of these surveillance campaigns.

Meanwhile, the NSA has not commented on the malware matter, with a government spokesperson saying that any disclosure of classified material is harmful to the national security of the United States.

U.K. PM Cameron Wants To Block Extremist Websites

David Cameron, the British prime minister, has recently said in parliament that the U.K. government wants to block Internet access to certain extremist Islamist sites, Business Insider reports. On October 23rd, when discussing the measures the U.K. government is taking to combat terrorism, Cameron said that the government has various steps in place to disrupt the extremist narrative, including [...] blocking online sites, with the remark apparently being overlooked by the media. However, Cameron did not offer any details on how the government would define extremism or how the blocking of such sites would occur and who would oversee the ban.

The prime minister has repeatedly said that he wants to change U.K. law to censor more of the Internet, Business Insider notes. Cameron has also recently announced that he wants to create a new law that would punish owners of pornography videos that depict rape with three years in prison.

Furthermore, in July Cameron revealed plans to ban pornography in the region, with users interested in adult shows having to register their intentions with their ISP in order to access such content. The proposal was met with concerns in the U.K., specifically because the company hired to develop the porn filter for ISPs is owned by Huawei, which was accused of spying for the Chinese military in the past.

Vietnam Announces Big Fines for Social Media ’Propaganda’

Vietnam will hand out fines of 100 million dong ($4,740) to anyone criticizing the government on social media, under a new law announced this week, the latest measure in a widening crackdown on dissent by the country’s communist rulers.

Comments that did not constitute criminal offences would trigger fines if held to be "propaganda against the state", or spreading "reactionary ideology", according to the law signed by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung.

Vietnam has repeatedly drawn fire for the harsh treatment and lengthy jail terms it has given to bloggers who criticized its one-party regime. The number of arrests and convictions has soared in the last four years.

The new decree is vaguely worded and did not say what comments amounted to a criminal offence, which can be punished with prison, or an "administrative violation" that rates a fine.

Internet penetration is soaring in a country of an estimated 90 million people, a third of whom use the internet and about 20 million of whom have Facebook accounts, a report published at a seminar on information technology in Ho Chi Minh City in September showed.

A Vietnamese Facebook user who campaigned online for the release of his brother jailed for criticizing the government fell afoul of the same law and was last month sentenced to 15 months of house arrest.

Rights groups and foreign governments have come down hard on Vietnam over its draconian cyber laws, including the United States, which has urged Vietnam to improve its human rights record to strengthen its case for stronger trade ties.

Media freedom campaigners Reporters Without Borders calls the country "an enemy of the internet".

The law would anger social media users, said Nguyen Lan Thang, a well-known Vietnamese Internet activist, who questioned the need for it.

"How could the government be destroyed by comments and the sharing of information on personal social media?" Thang said.

The decree also said anyone posting online a map of Vietnam inconsistent with the country’s sovereignty claims faced fines.

The issue is hugely sensitive in Vietnam, where China’s perceived encroachment of territory generates the kind of quiet anger experts say Vietnam’s government wants to rein in.

China’s Rumor Crackdown Has ’Cleaned’ Internet, Official Says

China’s campaign against online rumors, which critics say is crushing free speech, has been highly successful in "cleaning" the Internet, a top official of the country’s internet regulator said on Thursday.

China has the world’s most sophisticated online censorship system, known outside the country as the Great Firewall. It blocks many social media websites, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and others, along with many sites hosted in Taiwan and those of rights groups and some foreign media agencies.

The crackdown on online rumors is really intended to quash anti-government discourse, activists say. High profile users of Sina Weibo, China’s Twitter-like microblog, have been targeted, apparently for political speech.

In a rare public appearance, Ren Xianliang, vice minister of the State Internet Information Office, emphasized China’s commitment to scrubbing the web of content it deemed critical or offensive.

"The fight against rumors has received a positive response and has been quite effective," he said.

"The Internet has become clean. The frequency of slander has declined, but it has not impacted the orderly flow of information."

Although social media has become a platform for users to voice complaints and criticism about the government, authorities force domestic internet firms to delete user-posted content they consider too politically sensitive.

China will work to strengthen regulation of the internet by training local internet regulators and net companies, Ren added, and further "manage" search and microblogs as well as Tencent’s popular WeChat app.

"We will meet the demands of the people to create a cyberspace with Chinese characteristics," Ren said.

He reiterated China’s right to block websites with information on Tibetan independence or support for separatists in China’s far western region of Xinjiang.

"Some websites propagating material on Tibet and Xinjiang aim to split our nation, or try to subvert the power of the state," Ren added. "This runs counter to China’s laws and regulations."

Techies vs. NSA: Encryption Arms Race Escalates

Encrypted email, secure instant messaging and other privacy services are booming in the wake of the National Security Agency’s recently revealed surveillance programs. But the flood of new computer security services is of variable quality, and much of it, experts say, can bog down computers and isn’t likely to keep out spies.

In the end, the new geek wars between tech industry programmers on the one side and government spooks, fraudsters and hacktivists on the other may leave people’s PCs and businesses’ computer systems encrypted to the teeth but no better protected from hordes of savvy code crackers.

"Every time a situation like this erupts you’re going to have a frenzy of snake oil sellers who are going to throw their products into the street," says Carson Sweet, CEO of San Francisco-based data storage security firm CloudPassage. "It’s quite a quandary for the consumer."

Encryption isn’t meant to keep hackers out, but when it’s designed and implemented correctly, it alters the way messages look. Intruders who don’t have a decryption key see only gobbledygook.

A series of disclosures from former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden this year has exposed sweeping U.S. government surveillance programs. The revelations are sparking fury and calls for better encryption from citizens and leaders in France, Germany, Spain and Brazil who were reportedly among those tapped. Both Google and Yahoo, whose data center communications lines were also reportedly tapped, have committed to boosting encryption and online security. Although there’s no indication Facebook was tapped, the social network is also upping its encryption systems.

"Yahoo has never given access to our data centers to the NSA or to any other government agency. Ever," wrote Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer in a Nov. 18 post on the company’s Tumblr blog announcing plans to encrypt all of its services by early next year. "There is nothing more important to us than protecting our users’ privacy."

For those who want to take matters into their own hands, encryption software has been proliferating across the Internet since the Snowden revelations broke. Heml.is Swedish for "secret" is marketed as a secure messaging app for your phone. MailPile aims to combine a Gmail-like user friendly interface with a sometimes clunky technique known as public key encryption. Younited hopes to keep spies out of your cloud storage, and Pirate Browser aims to keep spies from seeing your search history. A host of other security-centered programs with names like Silent Circle, RedPhone, Threema, TextSecure, and Wickr all promise privacy.

Many of the people behind these programs are well known for pushing the boundaries of privacy and security online. Heml.is is being developed by Peter Sunde, co-founder of notorious file sharing website The Pirate Bay. Finland’s F-Secure, home of Internet security expert Mikko Hypponen, is behind Younited. Dreadlocked hacker hero Moxie Marlinspike is the brains behind RedPhone, while Phil Zimmerman, one of the biggest names in privacy, is trying to sell the world on Silent Circle. Even flamboyant file sharing kingpin Kim Dotcom is getting in on the secure messaging game with an encrypted email service.

The quality of these new programs and services is uneven, and a few have run into trouble. Nadim Kobeissi, developed encrypted instant messaging service Cryptocat in 2011 as an alternative to services such as Facebook chat and Skype. The Montreal-based programmer received glowing press for Cryptocat’s ease of use, but he suffered embarrassment earlier this year when researchers discovered an error in the program’s code, which may have exposed users’ communications. Kobeissi used the experience to argue that shiny new privacy apps need to be aggressively vetted before users can trust them.

"You need to be vigilant," he says. "We're two years old and we're just starting to reach the kind of maturity I would want."

Heml.is also encountered difficulties and angered users when its creators said they wouldn't use open source or publicly auditable code. And Silent Circle abruptly dropped its encrypted email service in August, expressing concern that it could not keep the service safe from government intrusion.

"What we found is the encryption services range in quality," says George Kurtz, CEO of Irvine, Calif.-based CrowdStrike, a big data, security technology company. "I feel safe using some built by people who know what they are doing , but others are Johnny-come-latelies who use a lot of buzzwords but may not be all that useful."

Even so, private services report thousands of new users, and nonprofit, free encryption services say they have also see sharp upticks in downloads.

And for many users, encryption really isn't enough to avoid the U.S. government's prying eyes.

Paris-based Bouygues Telecom told its data storage provider Pogoplug in San Francisco that it needs the data center moved out of the U.S. to get out from under the provisions of U.S. law. So this month, PogoPlug CEO Daniel Putterman is keeping Bouygues as a client by shipping a multi-million dollar data center, from cabinets to cables, from California to France.

"They want French law to apply, not U.S. law," says Putterman, who is also arranging a similar move for an Israeli client.

Bouygues spokesman Alexandre Andre doesn't draw a direct connection with the Patriot Act, and says Bouygues' arrangement with Pogoplug is driven by concerns over performance and privacy. Andre says Bouygues wants the data stored in France, but it was up to Pogoplug to decide whether this would be done on Bouygues' own servers or Pogoplug's.

"There is a general worry in France over data security, and storing data in France permits us to reassure our clients," Andre says. The arrangement also helps improve the service's performance, Andre says, another reason for the move.

For Pogoplug, business is booming it's garnered close to 1 million paid subscribers in its first year and Putterman says the company is anxious to accommodate concerned clients. And this month, Pogoplug launched a $49 software package called Safeplug that prevents third parties, from the NSA to Google, from learning about a user's location or browsing habits.

But many warn that encryption offers a false sense of security.

"The fundamental designers of cryptography are in an arms race right now, but there are a series of weaknesses and missing oversights that have nothing to do with encryption that leave people vulnerable," says Patrick Peterson, CEO of Silicon Valley-based email security firm Agari. And many that do work, bog down or freeze computers, forcing "a trade-off between security and convenience," he says.

In any case, most attacks don't happen because some cybercriminal used complicated methods to gain entry into a network, he adds.

"Most attacks occur because someone made a mistake. With phishing emails, it just takes one person to unwittingly open an attachment or click on a malicious link, and from there, cybercriminals are able to get a foothold," Peterson says.

In addition, experts agree that with enough time and money, any encryption can be broken. And already the NSA has bypassed or altogether cracked much of the digital encryption that businesses and everyday Web surfers use, according to reports based on Snowden’s disclosures. The reports describe how the NSA invested billions of dollars, starting in 2000, to make nearly everyone’s secrets available for government consumption.

Meanwhile, the U.S. government’s computing power continues to grow. This fall, the NSA plans to open a $1.7 billion cyber-arsenal a Utah data center filled with super-powered computers designed to store massive amounts of classified information, including data that awaits decryption.

Dutch Regulator: Google Spins An Invisible Web of Our Personal Data

A Dutch regulator on Thursday said that Google s privacy policy update in March 2012 that covers all the online services offered by the search giant is in breach of local laws. Google spins an invisible web of our personal data, without our consent, Jacob Kohnstamm, chairman of the College for the Protection of Personal Data said. And that is forbidden by law. In a press release, the regulator said that Google is collecting information about its users through various services and combines the obtained data in order to deliver tailored ads and content to users.

But Google isn t informing users adequately about the data combining process, nor does it offer them an option to consent to or reject the personal data processing done by the company. The regulator said that the general terms of service introduced by Google starting with March 1, 2012 are not enough, as local law requires that users give explicit consent for their personal data to be used in such a manner. According to the watchdog s report, there are three kind of Google users that are tracked by the company: people who have Google accounts, people who don t have Google accounts but still use public Google services that do not require logins including Google Search and YouTube and people who do not use Google at all, but whose online activities are still tracked by the company s ad cookies found on more than 2 million websites.

The regulator has invited Google to attend a hearing, after which it will decide whether it will take any action against the company. In addition to the Netherlands, five other countries in the region are investigating Google s privacy policy including France, Spain, Germany, U.K. and Italy. Spain has already initiated sanction proceedings against Google, finding that Google Spain and Google Inc. may be committing six infractions against the local data protection law. Google faces fines of up to $408,000 in the region.

Google spokesman Al Verney said that Google s privacy policy respects European law, and allows the company to create simpler, more effective services, The Associated Press reports. Verney also said that Google had engaged full with the Dutch investigation, and it will continue to do so.

Dutch DPA: privacy policy Google in breach of data protection law

Press release, 28 november 2013

The combining of personal data by Google since the introduction of its new privacy policy on 1 March 2012 is in breach of the Dutch data protection act [Wet bescherming persoonsgegevens]. This is the conclusion of the investigation by the Dutch data protection authority [College bescherming persoonsgegevens]. Google combines the personal data from internet users that are collected by all kinds of different Google services, without adequately informing the users in advance and without asking for their consent. The investigation shows that Google does not properly inform users which personal data the company collects and combines, and for what purposes. Google spins an invisible web of our personal data, without our consent. And that is forbidden by law , says the chairman of the Dutch data protection authority, Jacob Kohnstamm.

The Dutch DPA has invited Google to attend a hearing, after which the authority will decide whether it will take enforcement measures.

With its services, Google reaches almost every person in the Netherlands with internet access. It is almost impossible not to use Google services on the Internet. Many internet users use the search engine Search, the videoservice YouTube or the webmail Gmail. In the Report, three types of users of Google services are distinguished: people with a Google account, people without a Google account that use the open services of Google such as Search and YouTube, and people that do not use Google. Google also collects data about this last group of users, when they for example visit one of the more than 2 million websites worldwide with Google advertising cookies.

The investigation shows that Google combines personal data relating to internet users that the company obtains from different services. Google does this, amongst others, for the purposes of displaying personalised ads and to personalise services such as YouTube and Search. Some of these data are of a sensitive nature, such as payment information, location data and information on surfing behaviour across multiple websites. Data about search queries, location data and video s watched can be combined, while the different services serve entirely different purposes from the point of view of users. Google does not adequately inform users about the combining of their personal data from all these different services. On top of that, Google does not offer users any (prior) options to consent to or reject the examined data processing activities. The consent, required by law, for the combining of personal data from different Google services cannot be obtained by accepting general (privacy) terms of service.

In January 2012, Google announced that by 1 March 2012 the new privacy policy would apply to all users worldwide. The French data protection authority (CNIL) then initiated an investigation on behalf of all European data protection authorities (united in the Article 29 Working Party). This resulted in findings, that have been published in October 2012. After this initial investigation (with reference to the European Privacydirective), six national privacy authorities, in France, Germany (Hamburg), the UK, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands have decided to initiate national investigations, based on their own national laws.

NSA Spied on Porn Habits To Discredit Muslim Radicals

The NSA targeted suspected Muslim radicals by gathering evidence of visits to pornographic sites in order to harm their reputation, according to a report Wednesday based on a document provided by leaker Edward Snowden.

A classified document about intercepted communications or signals intelligence concluded that radicalizers appear to be particularly vulnerable in the area of authority when their private and public behaviors are not consistent, according to a Huffington Post article co-authored by investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald.

NBC News was not immediately able to confirm the authenticity of the document.

Jameel Jaffer, Depty Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, said: "This report is an unwelcome reminder of what it means to give an intelligence agency unfettered access to individuals' most sensitive information. One ordinarily associates these kinds of tactics with the secret police services of authoritarian governments.

"That these tactics have been adopted by the world s leading democracy and the world s most powerful intelligence agency is truly chilling.

Dated Oct. 3, 2012, the document, identifies six Muslims identified by the agency as exemplars of how personal vulnerabilities can be learned through electronic surveillance, and then exploited to undermine a target's credibility, reputation and authority, the report said.

One of the six is described as a U.S. person" - either a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident.

A report set to be published in Spain's El Mundo newspaper will feature leaked information from Edward Snowden that says the NSA monitored 60 million phone calls in Spain last December.

The document, which the Huffington Post said was provided by Snowden, lists the Director of the NSA as its originator and the Departments of Justice and Commerce and the Drug Enforcement Administration among its recipients.

Greenwald, who until recently worked for U.K. newspaper The Guardian, was the first to report the contents of the classified documents seen by Snowden.

U.S. authorities have never formally confirmed the veracity of any of Snowden s documents, but it has charged the former intelligence contractor with leaking classified information.

Hollywood Looks To Raid Switzerland s Piracy Safe Haven

In Switzerland, it is completely legal for Internet users to download copyrighted content from illegal sources. As a result, file-sharing portals are very popular there, especially since Netflix hasn t come to Switzerland yet. According to the International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA), 35 percent of Swiss Internet users take advantage of this each month by using unlicensed services. To combat this piracy, according to a report by TorrentFreak, a working group is recommending

fairly drastic measures to the Swiss Justice Minister, including that Swiss ISPs delete illegal content on Swiss-based sites, display warning when accessing unauthorized content sources, and make obviously illegal sites inaccessible.

These recommendations are unsurprisingly being influenced by the U.S. and entertainment companies. Reportedly, America s Swiss Embassy and a local anti-piracy group are actively participating in the working group s talks. In addition, the U.S. Trade Representative released a report earlier this year that states, The United States strongly encourages Switzerland to demonstrate its commitment to copyright protection and to combating online piracy vigorously, including by taking steps to ensure that rights holders can protect their rights.

Unlike in the U.S., the Swiss ISPs are much more opposed to being told how to combat piracy. They do not want to become Internet police and fear that such measures could lead to further problems, such as censoring political content.

We reject the monitoring of Internet traffic on principle, because to have exceptions opens a dangerous door, said Andrej Vckovski, president of ISP industry association Simsa.

Atlantic City Casinos Approved for Internet Bets

Gamblers across New Jersey will be able to place bets online beginning at midnight after state regulators on Monday approved 13 internet gaming websites run by six Atlantic City casinos.

If a five-day test phase has been any indication, demand in the state of nearly 9 million people could be high. The total number of players logging on hit 10,000 during the first three days of 24-hour testing, regulators said.

New Jersey is the third U.S. state, but by far the most populous, to roll out online gaming. Officials hope the effort can rescue Atlantic City’s sagging casino revenues.

During testing, regulators found "no significant, widespread regulatory problems or technical barriers for going live," said David Rebuck, director of the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement, in a call with reporters.

Casinos were limited to 500 players on each site at one time during testing, and they were not allowed to advertise widely. As of midnight the restrictions will be lifted for those who won regulatory approval.

"You have to be gradual. You have to be cautious. You have to be measured," Rebuck said, noting that casinos didn’t want to invite large numbers of players until they knew the systems could handle the traffic.

"You’re going to see accelerating efforts by them to be much more aggressive" about marketing, he said.

The casinos use geolocation services to figure out whether someone from outside the state is trying to hack in online. Such technology has been used already in Delaware and Nevada, the other two states to offer some

form of online wagering, but Rebuck said regulators in New Jersey demanded "a higher standard of operations."

Regulators and casinos sent testers out of state and asked them to try to crack into the New Jersey websites, but nobody broke through, he said.

"I’m not saying this is foolproof by any means," he said. "Somebody at some time will find a way to get around this, and we have to be extra vigilant."

The first test patron logged on to a site operated by Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa from somewhere in New Brunswick on Thursday evening. Many hits came later from areas within New Jersey that are near New York City and Philadelphia, he said.

Borgata, owned by Boyd Gaming Corp and MGM Resorts, is one of the six casino operators moving forward to live sites at midnight.

Borgata spokesman Joe Lupo would not reveal specifics about where in the state their players were located, how much they were betting or how long they spent online, because the information is proprietary, he said.

A spokesman for Caesars Entertainment Inc, which received permission to open several online gaming sites to the public, said the company was pleased with the number of players and that it expected to see "an uptick in users every day," but wouldn’t provide details.

Golden Nugget, whose parent company is Landry’s Inc, decided to remain in a test phase after regulators reviewed with it some "shortcomings," Rebuck said.

The casino expects to resolve those issues - which included problems reporting revenues internally and to regulators - within the week at the latest, according to its general manager Tom Pohlman.

Katie Couric To Anchor Yahoo’s Video News Coverage

Katie Couric is joining Yahoo to anchor an expansion of the Internet company’s video news coverage in a move that she hopes will help persuade other broadcast TV veterans to make the transition into online programming.

Monday’s announcement confirms recent published reports that Couric is hoping to attract more viewers on the Internet after spending the past 22 years working as a talk-show host and news anchor at NBC, CBS and ABC.

"I am particularly excited about hopefully attracting other people to this platform and venture," Couric said in an interview with The Associated Press. "We are in a major, transformative time in terms of media in this country."

Couric’s hiring is the latest coup for Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer as she brings in well-known journalists in an effort to create compelling content that will attract more people to the company’s online services. In the past month, Yahoo has also lured away technology columnist David Pogue and political reporter Matt Bai from The New York Times.

Financial terms of Couric’s contract with Yahoo weren’t disclosed. She also declined to say how many more reporters will be added to her team at Yahoo.

Couric, 56, will continue to host her daytime talk show, "Katie," on ABC even after she becomes Yahoo’s "global anchor" beginning early next year. She described her now role at Yahoo as a "work in progress."

"I will be involved in developing a lot of concepts, but not necessarily doing everything," Couric said. "I will be doing interviews, but not on a daily basis. Probably monthly at this point."

The Yahoo job appealed to Couric because it will give her an outlet to delve into breaking developments around the world that she regularly covered as the anchor of CBS’ evening news from 2006 through 2011.

Mayer, since leaving Google Inc. to become Yahoo’s CEO 16 months ago, has been trying to make Yahoo’s services more alluring so people will visit them on a regular basis and dwell for longer periods. In doing so, she is hoping Yahoo will be able to sell more digital ads and boost the Sunnyvale, Calif., company’s revenue, which has been lagging the overall growth of Internet marketing for years.

"News is a definitive daily habit for our users, and Katie will work with our talented editorial team to pioneer a new chapter of digital journalism," Mayer said.

Yahoo already operates the most popular online news section in the U.S. with 81.5 million visitors in October, according to the most recent data from the research firm comScore Inc. The audience’s size is roughly the same as when Mayer became Yahoo’s CEO. CNN ranks second in online news in the U.S., with 70 million visitors.

Couric first became a household name as a co-host of the "Today" show on NBC from 1991 until she left to join CBS in 2006.

It remains unclear whether Couric’s current talk show on ABC will be renewed after its run ends in May. Her show is drawing an average 2.17 million viewers so far this season, slightly below an average of 2.26 million viewers attracted during its inaugural season in 2012, according to the ratings firm Nielsen.

The Walt Disney Co., which produces the show, and the owned and operated stations that air the program haven’t decided whether to bring back the show for a third season, said Bill Carroll, an expert on the syndication market for Katz Media. Couric also said she is trying to figure out whether she still wants to do the talk show.

Anti-Elop Fever Within Microsoft Is Astonishing

A new report has once again received highly detailed leaks about Microsoft s internal deliberations about the next CEO. And once again, the leaks have a decidedly anti-Elop slant. According to the brand new Bloomberg scoop, the two leading candidates are now Ford s Mulally and Microsoft s own Nadella. What I find fascinating is that the article goes out of its way to spell out that Elop is no longer a leading candidate

for the top job. It is highly unusual that the CEO selection process receives such high-profile and detailed coverage by leading news organizations. And it is almost unprecedented that a series of articles has multiple sources specifically highlighting aspects of the selection process that are unfavorable to one of the candidates. Namely Elop.

Just a few weeks ago, Bloomberg leaked information that was deeply damaging to Elop in an article that claimed Elop was set to get rid of both the Bing and Xbox divisions if he became the Microsoft CEO. Another set of leakers informed AllThingsD that Elop and a few other leading candidates are not quite ready for prime time. What this means that there are several high-level Microsoft executives who really, really do not want Elop to become the CEO. We are talking about revulsion or fear that is leading them to leak negative views about Elop to leading news organizations on a nearly weekly basis.

This is such a weird, dysfunctional selection process. It will be simply fascinating to see how it wraps up.

One thing is certain: if Elop manages to defy his ruthless critics inside Microsoft and grab the CEO baton, he is going to start a purge that will clean out the upper ranks of the company with vengeance. The people running the anti-Elop campaign are putting their survival at stake with this media campaign.

IBM-Nvidia Deal Latest in Hot Supercomputer Sector

Rapid changes in ultra-fast computing continue to accelerate, with IBM and Nvidia providing some of the latest evidence.

The companies are using the kickoff of a gathering of supercomputer users and suppliers to announce plans to make IBM s forthcoming Power 8 processors work in tandem with Nvidia s Tesla graphics chips. IBM systems that will result from the partnership will target scientific applications as well as run business software, the companies said.

Their alliance typifies several trends in the supercomputer sector including jockeying for technical supremacy between companies and countries that are reflected in a new ranking of the 500 largest systems being announced Monday.

A massive machine from China called Tianhe-2, which grabbed the top spot in the twice-yearly Top500 ranking last June, remains atop the list as the SC13 conference opens in Denver. It has 16,000 computing nodes each with two Intel Xeon processors and three of that company s new Xeon Phi co-processors for a combined total of 3.12 million computing cores. There are also homegrown Chinese processors in the system.

Titan, a Cray system at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, remained No. 2. It uses Advanced Micro Devices processors alongside Nvidia co-processors.

The U.S. remains the biggest user of supercomputers, with 265 of the 500 largest machines, while China was No. 2 with 63, according to the Top500 listed.

Among system vendors, Hewlett-Packard edged out IBM for the greatest number of machines on the list, rising to 195 systems from 189 six months

ago. IBM had 166 systems, but because it tends to sell larger systems Big Blue accounted for the greatest share of total computing power among Top500 machines.

Supercomputers are room-sized machines that look much like a standard collection of servers, but use different designs and communications circuitry to apply huge amounts of hardware to individual problems. They have long been used for purposes such as weapons design and climate-change studies, but are increasingly important in fields like designing cars and consumer products.

Technology vendors and their customers keep racing to build ever-larger systems, aided by advances in computer chips. But designers are hobbled by an energy barrier: simply stringing together more general-purpose processors like the x86 chips sold by Intel and AMD is running into diminishing returns because the approach uses too much electricity.

That s why designers increasingly augment that circuitry with chips that can accelerate certain kinds of tasks, like the Nvidia graphics chips that evolved from videogame systems or a new auxiliary chip from Intel called the Xeon Phi.

Where a high-end x86 chip might have 8 to 16 electronic brains, these accelerators have dozens to hundreds of smaller calculating engines. As a result, fewer chips are required to get the same amount of work done than on standard processors, yielding significant energy savings. Fifty-three machines on latest Top500 list use accelerators.

But innovation is still needed in other areas. The U.S. Department of Energy on Friday announced $25.4 million in R&D contracts to AMD, Cray, IBM, Intel and Nvidia to improve circuitry that links chips together in supercomputers to boost speed and reduce energy consumption.

Another hot topic is how to cool such systems in an energy-efficient way. One unusual approach is being used at a supercomputer for the DOE s National Renewable Energy Laboratory, supplied by H-P with chips from Intel. It pumps warm water to help carry heat away from the circuitry, which helps heat nearby offices and reduces bills on air conditioning to cool the computer room.

They are achieving an incredible return on investment, says Scott Misage, H-P s director of high-performance computing.

A system at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, which includes Nvidia and Intel chips, immerses circuitry in a type of oil to cool the system in a novel way.

Other designers have been focusing on ways to use memory to provide more data more quickly for number-crunching. A new Cray system with Intel chips for Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, dubbed Catalyst, uses an unusually large amount chips call DRAMs for each computing node some 128 gigabytes worth, along with 800 gigabytes of flash memory, a technology not widely used now in supercomputers.

IBM has focused most of its efforts in supercomputers up to now on systems powered by its special-purpose BlueGene chips or on machines that use Intel s Xeon processors. Its Power chips are most often used in high-end servers used by companies.

But Big Blue has been trying to break the Power technology out of its

niche, announcing a consortium in August that will license those designs to other companies.

Nvidia, which joined that group, now expects to find its technology in Power-based computers as well as the more common x86 variety.

Sumit Gupta, general manager of Nvidia s Tesla unit, noted that IBM has offered x86-based supercomputers with Nvidia chips before. But he characterized IBM s decision to broaden the appeal of its Power line with Nvidia s help a major commitment. It s a very strategic move, he said.

The news comes at a time when IBM s Power design has been losing ground in other areas from videogame consoles to TV set-top boxes, says Patrick Moorhead, an analyst with Moor Insights & Strategy. IBM determined to use the Power line with Nvidia s chips to play a bigger-role in cloud-style data centers.

They are betting the farm on Power, Moorhead said.

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